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ABSTRACT

The study examined the changes in the quality of life of country families in four eastern Kentucky counties between 1960 and 1973. Since quality of life is an abstract concept, the changes were assessed with respect to income, occupation, and level of living. The aim was to assess the changes in both objective and subjective terms as the families in the country areas of the Cumberland Mountains saw them when surveyed in the late spring and early summer of 1973. Surveys were conducted in 1961 and 1973. In 1961, inter-family differences were examined. Families were classified by family life cycle stage: working age families without children (head under 60 years); families with young children (oldest child under 10); families with adolescent aged children (oldest child 17 or younger); families with mature children at home (oldest child 18 or older); and older families without children (head aged 60 or older). In 1973, 317 families living in the country in the same counties surveyed in 1961, and for the most part in the same sample segments, were surveyed. Some findings were: (1) levels of living as indicated by household possessions improved dramatically in 1973; (2) median family income nearly doubled between 1960 and 1972; and (3) despite the improvement in income and levels of living, mountain families still lagged behind those elsewhere in income, education, and levels of living. (NQ)

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# THE CHANGE IN THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF COUNTRY FAMILIES IN THE CUMBERLAND MOUNTAINS OF EASTERN KENTUCKY, 1960 TO 1973*

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In the late 1950's many affluent Americans were troubled by the plight of the rural poor. Almost the whole of rural southeastern United States was shown by the United States Department of Agriculture (1955) to be characterized by low income and levels of living, and the Appalachian area of this region was among the most seriously depressed of all. Later, a survey of The Southern Appalachian Region (1962), systematically documented the socioeconomic conditions and emphasized the region's persistent problems. The median income of rural families was below the poverty line, and that of urban families only slightly above it. Historic themes of individualism and self-reliance, traditionalism, fatalism, fundamentalism and familism were pervasive.

Within the Southern Appalachians, the people living in the hills and hollows of the Cumberland Mountains of eastern Kentucky were the regional archetype. Harry Caudill (1962), the perceptive mountain lawyer, analyzed "The Scene Today", as it was in 1962, in the following terms:

> The present crisis is compounded of many elements, human and material. They have produced what is probably the most seriously depressed region in the nation--and the adjective applies in much more than an economic sense. They have brought economic depression, to be sure, and it lies like a gray pall over the whole land. But a deeper tragedy lies in

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> the depression of the human spirit which has fallen upon so many people, making them, for the moment at least, listless, hopeless, and without ambition.

Through the descriptive and interpretive writing of Caudill (1962), Weller (1966), Fetterman (1970), and numerous others the mountaineer's plight was brought to the attention of millions of Americans. The hillbilly, living in semi-isolation, without benefit of modern conveniences, and his quaint lifestyle have become a modern legend.

How much different today--a decade or so later--is the quality of life in the Cumberland Mountains? The purpose of this paper is to compare present conditions with those existing among country families in four eastern Kentucky counties in the early 1960's.[1]

## The Situation in 1960

By almost any of the conventional criteria of modern living standards the people in these counties--Harlan, Perry, Whitley, and Wolfe--suffered from extreme deprivation. From 49 to 81 percent of the families by county had incomes below $3,000 compared to 33 percent for the nation as a whole (Brown and Ramsey, 1963). Income per capita ranged from 64 to 24 percent of the national average ($2,223), and the dependency ratio was two times or more larger than that of the United States. Mining, subsistence agriculture and wholesale and retail trade were the principal sources of earned income, but 14 percent of total personal income in these counties came from transfer payments (Ramsey and Warner, 1974).

Over three-fourths of the population in these four counties lived in rural areas in 1960, and in many respects their situations were less satisfactory than that of the residents of small

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1/ This question is treated in greater detail in C. Milton Coughenour, Quality of Life of Country Families in Four Eastern Kentucky Counties: Change and Persistent Problems, 1961 and 1973. Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky, Agricultural Experiment Station, 1975.

towns. Data obtained in a sample survey in 1961 indicate that the households were relatively large--averaging over four persons (4.07) per household compared to 3.29 for the nation as a whole--and 82 percent had less than $4,000 in total family income. Household heads averaged 51.6 years of age, and 7.0 years of formal schooling. Eight of nine heads under 65 years of age were fully or partly able to work, and a similar percentage was employed full or part-time.

By modern standards they lived a spartan life. Only 47 percent had a automobile, and only 41 percent had water piped into the house. While 64 percent had a gas or electric range, only 15 percent had a flush toilet in the house; 21 percent a bath or shower; 13 percent had central heating; only 26 percent had a telephone, and only 11 percent took a weekly newspaper. Eighty-five percent, however, had a radio and 58 percent had television sets.

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that 34 percent of the male household heads and 30 percent of the homemakers felt that their family income was unsatisfactory, and 46 and 28 percent of the heads and homemakers, respectively, felt that they had to go without necessities. The more surprising fact is that the majority in each case felt that family income was at least satisfactory and that they were not deprived in the sense of having to go without what they regarded as necessities of living.

However, the general state of mind of people in the Cumberland Mountains in 1961 also is indicated by their responses to the Srole Anomia Scale items, as follows:

| | Heads | Homemakers |
|---|---|---|
| | -percent who agree- | |
| (1) Nowadays a person has to live pretty much for today and let tomorrow take care of itself..... | 37 | 61 |
| (2) In spite of what some people say, the lot of the average man is getting | | |

| | Heads | Homemakers |
|---|---|---|
| | -percent who agree- | |
| worse, not better ..... | 73 | 66 |
| (3) It's hardly fair to bring children into the world with the way things look for the future..... | 48 | 63 |
| (4) These days a person doesn't really know whom he can count on..... | 89 | 89 |
| (5) There's little use writing to public officials because often they aren't really interested in the problems of the average man..... | 72 | 77 |

Three-fifths or more of the homemakers gave anomic responses to all the Srole items and the heads gave anomic responses of similar magnitude to three of the five items. As indicated by their responses, Kentucky mountain residents were the most anomic of the respondents surveyed at this time in six southern states (McCann, 1975).

As many studies have shown, therefore, most of the families in country areas of the Cumberland Mountains of eastern Kentucky in 1961 lived in wretched circumstances which bred a forlorn and despairing spirit (Crowden, 1970). But, these general conditions did not necessarily apply equally to all types of families, and it is instructive to examine some of the differences among different types of families.

## Differences Among Families in 1961

To examine inter-family differences, families were classified by family life cycle stage:

I. Working age families without children (head under 60 years of age).

II. Families with young children (oldest child under 10 years of age).

III. Families with adolescent aged children (oldest child aged 17 or younger).

IV. Families with mature children at home (oldest child at home aged 18 or older).

V. Older families without children (head aged 60 or older).

Total family income in 1960 was greatest for Stage III families with adolescent aged children (median $2,200) and smallest among Stage V older families without children (median $1,675). But, on a per capita basis the situation was quite otherwise. Stage I working age families without children had the highest income per capita (median $855) while Stages III and IV families with adolescent or older aged children had the lowest per capita incomes (median $419 and $410, respectively). While over 80 percent of the under 65 years male heads of the first three stages were employed, only 70 percent of those in Stage IV was employed.

In the material aspects of their lives, the older families without children (Stage V) had the most spacious living arrangements--averaging 3.0 rooms per person--while families with young or adolescent aged children were most often in cramped quarters--averaging only 1.0 rooms per person. But, in material possessions, such as water piped in the house, bath or shower, central heating, telephone, radio, television, and weekly newspaper, there were few significant differences by family life cycle stage in 1961. Families differed significantly in these respects only with respect to possession of an automobile which half or more of the families in the first three stages, but only 27 percent in stage V, owned.

Regardless of differences in incomes and employment in 1960-61 heads of these families did not differ in the extent of felt satisfaction--dissatisfaction with income, or in the belief that they had to go without the necessities of living, and this lack of difference parallels that for material possessions. While homemakers were similarly minded in satisfaction with family income, those with children at home and the older homemakers were much more likely than younger ones without children (Stage I) to say that they had to go without necessities. Male heads of households also did not differ in the tendencies to express anomia by stage in family life cycle.

Anomic tendencies of homemakers, however, often reflected their family life cycle stage. Those with mature children at home (Stage IV) most often gave anomic responses with respect to the uselessness of writing to public officials (89%), bringing children into the world (73%), and about the lot of the average man getting worse (74%). Homemakers with young children (Stage II) were least often anomic on writing to public officials (62%), and about bringing children into the world (46%); homemakers with adolescent aged children were least often anomic about the worsening lot of the average man (47%).

In summary, in 1960-61 families living in the Cumberland Mountains of eastern Kentucky had low incomes and levels of living relative to families elsewhere in the United States, and they were highly anomic. However, dissatisfaction with income was surprisingly low, and differences among families in attitudes about income and society were more evident among homemakers than male heads of families.

Aspects of the 1960's

The 1960's and early 1970's witnessed state, regional, and federal programs designed to improve conditions in the Appalachian area (and other low income rural areas). Programs for hospital planning and construction, medical care, rehabilitation, rural ambulance services, and the like were introduced. A variety of employment and manpower training programs were established. Food stamps, school lunch, and black lung programs were launched and other welfare programs were expanded. New programs were established in water supply, housing, sewerage and solid waste disposal, flood and pollution control. Legislation regulating strip mining and reclamation was passed. Road systems were improved. VISTA and other groups of volunteers and Extension Service community development workers labored to help local people develop human and community resources.

Although many of these programs aimed to slow depopulation

of the Cumberlands, the four counties continued to experience severe population loss. By 1970, Harlan and Perry had lost nearly 27 percent of their 1960 populations; Wolfe lost 13 percent and Whitley 6 percent of their populations. Incomes of those who remained rose dramatically, however. Per capita income increased by 59 percent in Harlan, 81 percent in Perry, 167 percent in Whitley, and 162 percent in Wolfe county (Ramsey and Warner, 1974). The proportional increases in the latter two counties were above the state average, but average per capita incomes in 1970 in these counties still ranged from 43 to 72 percent of the United States average ($3,139), and from 36 to 59 percent of the families by county, and 39 percent in all four counties, were below the poverty threshold. Thus, despite considerable improvement, in economic respects, the Cumberland Mountains continued to be a relatively depressed area.

The 1973 Survey of Country Families

In conjunction with a regional project with seven other states in the south, a survey was conducted in 1973 of 317 families living in the country in the same counties surveyed in 1961, and for the most part in the same sample segments. The survey households averaged 3.1 persons--one person smaller than in 1961--and somewhat fewer families were in stage IV of the family life cycle with mature children at home. Proportionately more were working aged families either without children or with young children, or were older families without children. In median age household heads were one year older (52.6 years), and they had had 1.3 more years of schooling (13.3 years).

The general objective of the 1973 survey was to study changes in the quality of life during the past decade or so. Recognizing that quality of life is an abstract concept, the project committee sought to assess changes with respect to income, occupation and level of living. More importantly, the aim was to assess changes not merely in objective terms

but also in the subjective attitudes of heads and homemakers about the direction of change in quality of life and the status of the current situation. The remainder of this paper, therefore, sketches the changes in quality of life in both objective and subjective terms as the families in the country areas of the Cumberland Mountains saw these changes when surveyed in the late spring and early summer of 1973. In this case the date of the survey is important as since then the energy crisis and skyrocketing prices for coal has resulted in considerable change in the general economic situation of people in two of these four counties--Harlan and Perry-where coal is an abundant resource. The economic depression during the past year doubtless has influenced the situation in the other two counties in the opposite direction.

For the country families as a group, median family income: in 1960 dollars nearly doubled between 1960 and 1972 ($1,700 to $3,330), and owing to the smaller family size average per capita income did double ($521 to $1,053). This occurred despite the fact that the percent of the under 65 years, male household heads employed dropped from 73 to 69 percent while the proportion retired or disabled doubled. The proportion fully able to work was somewhat smaller in 1973 than in 1961. Sources of income changed dramatically with farming or farm work as an income source declining substantially while salaries, wages, social security and welfare proportionately increased. In the four counties as a whole, the percentage of total personal income derived from transfer payments increased from 14 to 22, and 37 percent of the increase in total personal income during this period came from the increase in income from transfer payments.

Levels of living as indicated by household possessions also improved dramatically. Seventy-nine percent lived on a paved or hard-surfaced road in 1973 compared to only 40 percent who did so in 1961. Fourteen percent more than in 1961

had an automobile (64 percent); 34 percent more had water piped into the house (74 percent). Ninety-four percent (up 30 percent) had a gas or electric range; 61 percent (up 42 percent) had a flush toilet inside the house and 60 percent (up 38 percent) had a bath or shower. Still, only one-third had central heating--an increase of 20 percent. Two-thirds had a telephone (up 40 percent); radio 95 percent and television 93 percent. But, only 22 percent (up 11 percent) took a weekly newspaper and no more than in 1960 (30 percent) received a daily newspaper. The rooms per person ratio increased from 1.33 to 1.67 during the decade, and the percent of households with less than one room per person decreased from 24 to 13 percent. In these important respects, the gap between country and town families in the mountains was considerably reduced during the intervening 12 years, and 57 percent of the heads and homemakers in the country areas in 1973 said that they were somewhat or much better off than a decade earlier compared to 13 percent who felt that they were worse off.

Despite the significant improvement in income and level of living heads and homemakers in 1973 were no more often satisfied with family income than in 1961, and both were much more likely to say that they had to go without necessities--over half felt this way. Moreover, homemakers were as likely to express anomic attitudes as they were in 1961, and unlike the 1961 sample the male household heads in 1973 were as often anomic as the homemakers. Thus, their desires for goods and services had expanded more rapidly than their abilities to acquire them, and as a whole they were as dispairing of societal conditions as before.

In 1973 the respondents were asked about the direction of change in various aspects of the quality of life during the past decade, i.e., whether it had improved, gotten worse or remained the same, and how they assessed the current situation, i.e., whether it was very good, pretty good, fair, or poor.

Most of the questions and the heads' and homemakers' responses are shown in Table 1.

More than half the respondents in 1973 felt that the quality of life during the past decade had improved for most people, the poor, blacks, the county as a place to live, and, specifically, with respect to wages and salaries, public schools, tertiary schools, medical care, welfare programs, transportation and roads, public utilities, and public housing. And, in each of these aspects more than half rated the current situation as pretty good to very good.

Those aspects that respondents in the greatest proportions (30 percent or more) thought had gotten worse were: the physical environment, "real" incomes, agriculture, law enforcement, and obedience to laws. Except for the physical environment a majority of the respondents felt that the current situation with respect to each of these aspects was only fair to poor. A majority also felt that the current situation was fair or poor with respect to opportunities for young and older people, job opportunities, county government, politics and political parties, and recreational opportunities. Opportunities for young people, job opportunities, and law enforcement were most often rated as "poor" by these respondents.

Thus, although in general and with respect to some aspects most of these mountain residents felt that the quality of life was much better and even perhaps satisfactory, there were other aspects, particularly with respect to job opportunities, real income and political institutions which left much to be desired. Four conclusions seem evident from examination of these opinions. First, the weight of opinion with respect to improvement in quality of life parallels objective changes in these counties for the most part. Second, as Photiadis contended in 1970, Mountain people now use national standards in evaluating their quality of life; provincialism, once passing, is now past so far as the material conditions of life

are concerned. Third, they are not as dissatisfied with the quality of the physical environment as many outside the region, who believe it has been seriously impaired by strip mining, may be or think Mountain people should be. Although local people recognize this as a problem area, it is far less serious than other aspects of their lives. In mid-1973 only 23 percent wanted strip mining prohibited, while 54 percent would let it continue under more stringent reclamation controls (Gabbard and Coughenour, 1973).

Finally, further analysis, which cannot be reported in detail here, indicates that anomic attitudes among the lowest income group in 1973 were associated with dissatisfaction with aspects of government and politics rather than with felt deprivation of income or "necessities". This contrasts with low-income heads and homemakers in the early 1960's whose anomic responses were associated with income dissatisfaction and felt deprivation.

Differences Among Families in Quality of Life in 1973

Stage II families with young children led the way in 1972 with the largest median total income ($4,253 in 1960 dollars) while oldest families (stage V) had the smallest incomes ($2,066) as they had in 1960. But, on a per capita basis stage I working age families without children had the most favorable financial situation ($1,477 in 1960 dollars) while families with adult children at home (stage IV) had by far the poorest income situation ($701). The smaller percentage of working age male heads of families employed in 1973 than in 1961 is chiefly reflected in comparatively lower proportions of stage I (56 percent) and stage III (73 percent) employed. The over 80 percent employed level of 1961 was matched by only the heads of stage II families in 1973. Stage I and stage IV families had the smallest proportions of healthy working men--65 and 62 percent, respectively--and these proportions seem surprising low. Compared to 1961 the biggest differences occurred between heads of stage III families which dropped from 96 to 73 percent fully able to work. Clearly,

those left behind in the out-migration of the 1960's often were persons who had some physical disability or who had retired at younger ages.

In the material aspects of living, Stage V families had the most spacious quarters in 1973 as in 1961 while those families at all stages with children were the most crowded, but also had improved most owing to having fewer children. Families did not differ much in the possession of most durable goods and household conveniences, but in 1973, Stage V families least often had an automobile, central heating, or a television set; those in stage II least often had a telephone or home freezer.

Despite family stage differences in income per capita, and a significant relationship between income per capita and dissatisfaction with family income as well as felt deprivation in the necessities of life, neither heads nor homemakers differed by life cycle stage as to satisfaction with income or the belief that they were unable to acquire necessities. Similarly, in their perceptions of change in their own family situation during the past decade, family stage differences were relatively small despite per capita income differences and its general relationship to the belief that improvement nad occurred. As was evident in 1961, therefore, the absence of major satisfaction differences among families at various stages of the life cycle tends to parallel the lack of systematic and major differences in the possession of the conveniences of living. (It also may reflect a common family life cycle reference group orientation as the basis of generating feelings of income satisfaction and dissatisfaction).

This conclusion is bolstered by the fact that in 1973 neither heads nor homemakers differed significantly by life cycle stage in the percentage giving anomic responses. Moreover, differences among families were relatively minor in their general opinions of the direction of change during the past decade for poor people, young people, old people, and the county as a place to live as well as in their ratings of the current situation.

Only with respect to the rating of the current situation and opportunities for old people did respondents' assessments differ significantly. The difference in this case is particularly interesting in that three out of four heads and homemakers with young or adolescent aged children (stages II and III) thought the current situation for old people was "fair" or "poor" compared to only one-half of those in stage V who felt this way. Moreover, working age respondents without children (stage I) were similar to stage V heads and homemakers in their assessment of the current situation for old people. This reversal in opinion is not reciprocated by the elderly who are somewhat more likely than the younger family heads and homemakers to think that the situation had improved for young people. Thus, stage II heads and homemakers tended to regard their own situation and that of older people less optimistically than did those at other stages of the life cycle.

In their opinions about the direction of change for specific aspects of the quality of life listed in Table 1 most of the differences among respondents by family life cycle stage are relatively small and not statistically significant. The exceptions are for income from wages and salaries, real income, and job opportunities which stage V heads and homemakers more often thought had improved than did those at other stages of the family life cycle. Moreover, with two exceptions respondents at different family life cycle stages tended to be alike in their assessments of the current situation. The exceptions are with respect to real income, which older respondents (Stage V) most often regard as pretty good or very good, and the current situation in the public schools which those with young children (Stage II) least often rate as either very good or poor.

In summary, the socioeconomic programs of state and federal governments during the 1960's along with continued out-

migration and reduced birth rates have resulted in substantial improvement in the material conditions of family life of country families in the Cumberland Mountains of eastern Kentucky. Families at all stages of the life cycle for the most part have shared in this advance despite differences in per capita income. Moreover, despite considerable generalized dissatisfaction, heads and homemakers consider that the quality of their life has improved and generally improved for most categories of people. Jobs, real income, the physical environment, county government, law enforcement, and obedience to laws continue to be, as they have in the past, most often regarded as problems which adversely affect the quality of life of mountain people. But, schools, medical care and services, welfare programs, roads and transportation, and public utilities are widely recognized as having been substantially improved.

In assessing the scene in the Cumberlands today, in many objective respects quality of life is much improved over a decade or so ago, both for individual families and in some institutional areas. However, despite this improvement mountain families still lag behind those elsewhere in income, education, and levels of living. Although one should not overlook numerous indications of satisfaction with the quality of life--more frequently expressed, perhaps, than many have yet recognized--feelings of dissatisfaction, even despair, are as prevalent as in former years. Like people elsewhere in the United States their aspirations and expectations have expanded and changed as their objective situation has improved.

Table 1. Opinions of Household Heads and Homemakers Living in Country Areas of the Cumberland Mountains of Eastern Kentucky About the Direction of Change in Quality of Life Aspects and Rating of the Current Situation in the County, 1973

| Quality of Life: for (or with respect to): | Direction of Change: Improved | Gotten Worse | Remained Same | Rating of Current Situation: Very Good | Pretty Good | Fair | Poor |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Most people (in general) | 63 | 20 | 17 | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 2. Poor people | 74 | 8 | 18 | 9 | 45 | 35 | 11 |
| 3. Young people | 42 | 20 | 38 | 3 | 26 | 23 | 48 |
| 4. Old people | 46 | 12 | 42 | 7 | 33 | 29 | 31 |
| 5. Negroes (blacks) | 56 | 11 | 33 | 13 | 49 | 23 | 15 |
| 6. Physical environment | 19 | 31 | 50 | 15 | 37 | 29 | 19 |
| 7. Wages and salaries | 79 | 3 | 18 | 8 | 50 | 34 | 8 |
| 8. "Real" income | 26 | 42 | 35 | 1 | 24 | 43 | 32 |
| 9. Job opportunities | 47 | 26 | 27 | 3 | 26 | 26 | 45 |
| 10. Agriculture | 40 | 33 | 28 | 5 | 36 | 33 | 26 |
| 11. Public schools | 77 | 12 | 11 | 29 | 48 | 16 | 7 |
| 12. Post high school education | 79 | 5 | 16 | 23 | 52 | 17 | 8 |
| 13. Medical care and services | 62 | 19 | 19 | 25 | 34 | 23 | 18 |
| 14. Welfare programs | 62 | 17 | 21 | 11 | 46 | 28 | 15 |
| 15. Transportation and roads | 71 | 18 | 11 | 6 | 49 | 26 | 19 |
| 16. Public utilities | 79 | 4 | 17 | 14 | 57 | 22 | 7 |
| 17. Public housing | 71 | 8 | 21 | 8 | 49 | 29 | 14 |
| 18. Politics and political parties | 16 | 25 | 59 | 5 | 22 | 45 | 28 |
| 19. County government | 27 | 21 | 52 | 7 | 28 | 41 | 24 |
| 20. Law enforcement | 20 | 38 | 42 | 2 | 27 | 31 | 40 |
| 21. Obedience to laws | 20 | 38 | 42 | 4 | 33 | 37 | 26 |
| 22. Religion | 36 | 16 | 48 | 22 | 48 | 22 | 8 |
| 23. Recreational opportunities | 45 | 7 | 48 | 6 | 30 | 29 | 35 |
| 24. County as a place to live | 58 | 9 | 33 | 23 | 47 | 24 | 6 |

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